When Drugs Come to School

A Resource Manual for Student Substance Use and School-Based Policy Development

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Nova Scotia Department of Health
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About this Manual

When Drugs Come to School: A Resource Manual for Student Substance Use and School-Based Policy Development is published by Addiction Services, Department of Health, in collaboration with Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services, Capital Health, and in consultation with the Department of Education and Addiction Services in the other shared service regions of Nova Scotia. The manual is intended to support initiatives to develop school drug policies and update the *School Drug Policy and Procedure Manual* (1989) to include recent trends in adolescent substance use, school and community partnerships, and harm minimization. The manual was developed in accordance with the *Nova Scotia Department of Education, School Code of Conduct* (2001).

The manual is divided into three sections:

Section A Provides an **introduction** to the manual, reports recent trends and statistics in student substance use in Nova Scotia, and introduces important concepts related to substance use prevention, education, intervention, and treatment.

Section B Outlines the potential benefits and effectiveness of implementing comprehensive student **substance use policy**, recommendations for key content areas based on current research, and a framework and process for developing student substance use policy.

Section C Lists **references** to documents produced by governmental and addictions agencies, as well as peer reviewed literature.

The information contained in this manual is based on current research and best practices in school policy development related to substance use. Substance use refers to the use of any chemical that affects living processes, other than food, that is taken into the body for non-medical purposes, or in non-accordance with a medical prescription. Although by definition this includes tobacco, research indicates that there may be specific, unique issues related to interventions, disciplinary actions, and treatments for tobacco use[1]. As such, this manual refers to tobacco use but focuses mainly on the use of alcohol and other substances, and is intended to complement *Making it work! Guidelines for Creating Effective Smoke-Free School-Based Policies (2002).* In addition, problem gambling is becoming an issue of growing concern in the field of addiction research, and may present specific concerns for schools. *When the Stakes are High: Gambling in our schools (2002)* provides a supplement to this manual, addressing the unique issues raised by adolescent gambling.

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Why Should I Read this Manual?

When Drugs Come to School: A Resource Manual for Student Substance Use and School-Based Policy Development aims to increase the capacity of school communities to engage in the challenging and rewarding task of promoting student health through incorporating a comprehensive policy that addresses student substance use into school improvement planning. To achieve this, the manual provides information to facilitate:

1 A collaborative process of developing a student substance use policy;
2 Partnerships between school communities and Addiction Services; and
3 Informed decisions based on Best Practices in Addiction Research regarding the content of a comprehensive student substance use policy.

Comprehensive policy includes clearly written rules, regulations, and consequences, offered in tandem with an educational strategy and early intervention and referral to counselling and treatment services.

Schools play an important role in both preventing and minimizing the harm associated with substance use among children and youth. Students spend a considerable amount of time at school and are influenced by the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of those in the school environment.[1] By developing a comprehensive student substance use policy, **schools have the opportunity** to help:

- Prevent or delay the onset of substance use or abuse among students;
- Minimize the harms associated with student substance use;
- Provide early intervention and referral, preventing the escalation of substance use and subsequent harms; and
- Promote the health and safety of the school community as a whole.

Many people beyond the walls of a school have an interest in student substance use policy (see p.8 for a complete list of stakeholders). **Involving members of the broader school community** in the development of a student substance use policy can ensure that:

- The policy is successfully implemented, enforced, and sustained.[2]
- Schools demonstrate their concern for the health, safety, and well-being of the entire school community,
- Students, parents, school personnel, and the community are aware of the school's position regarding substance use,
- Students and parents are aware of the disciplinary procedures, and
- School personnel are equipped to identify and support students harmfully involved in substance use (see p.12 for a complete discussion of the benefits of student substance use policy).

What's the Big Deal?

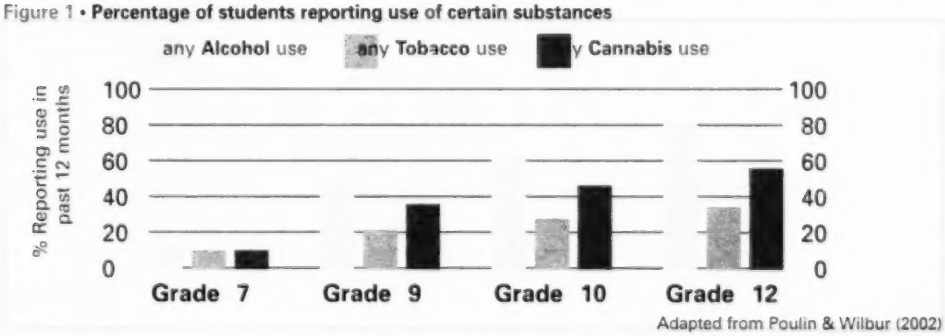
Trends in Student Substance Use

The *Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey*[3] is the provincial source for current information related to substance use among students in grades 7,9,10,and 12. The 2002 survey indicated:

- The percentage of students not reporting any substance use increased slightly from 35% in 1998 to 40.3% in 2002.
- 51.7% of students reported using alcohol at least once in the past year.
- 23.2% of students reported using tobacco at least once in the past year.
- 36.5% of students reported using cannabis at least once in the past year.
- 17.3% of students reported using alcohol, tobacco *and* cannabis in the past year.
- Although less common, the use of non-medical stimulants, and psilocybin or mescaline, has shown a continual increase over the years from 1991 to 2002.
- Similarly, the use of substances such as non-medicinal tranquilizers, crack or cocaine, PCP (phencyclidine), and heroin, has increased from 1991 to 2002; however these increases should be interpreted with caution given the very small numbers reporting such use.
- Substance use is an issue for schools **Middle Schools** and **High Schools** (see Figure 1).

These trends reinforce the need for schools to respond to student substance use. Furthermore, it must be noted that the *Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey* (2002) is a school-based survey, which may underestimate the actual prevalence of substance use (and other risk behaviours) by systematically excluding some youth through absenteeism or school dropout – both groups that are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviours.

Figure 1 • **Percentage of students reporting use of certain substances**



Adapted from Poulin & Wilbur (2002)

Harm Associated with Substance Use

Substance use is associated with many harms, and plays a major role in the premature death of children and youth[4], through their own and other's use. Some harms associated with substance use include:

- High risk behaviours, such as unplanned, unprotected, and unwanted sex
- Poor academic performance, suspension, expulsion, and/or school drop-out
- Trouble with the law
- Involvement in unsanctioned activity (i.e. violence, underage gambling)
- Injuries and accidents not involving vehicles, such as falls and drowning
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Alcohol related suicide

According to the *Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey* (2002):

- 30.5% of students reported at least one **alcohol-related problem** in the past year.
  The four most common problems reported by students who use alcohol included: causing damage to things, causing injury to oneself, engaging in unplanned sexual behaviour, and experiencing tensions or disagreement with family or friends.
- 23.4% of students reported at least one **drug-related problem** in the past year.
  The four most common problems reported by students who use drugs included: driving while under the influence, engaging in unplanned sexual intercourse, experiencing tensions or disagreement with family or friends, and being prevented from buying other things because of the cost of drugs.
- 29% of students reported engaging in sexual intercourse in the past year, of which 34.8% reported engaging in **unplanned sexual intercourse** while under the influence of alcohol or another drug.
- 6.6% of students who use alcohol, and 5.7% of students who use drugs (excluding alcohol or tobacco), reported having **trouble with law enforcement** at least once in the past year.
- 22.8% of students reported having been a **passenger in a motor vehicle** with an impaired driver in the past year.
- 15.9% of students who use drugs, and 4.9% who use alcohol, reported having their **school work or exams affected** by their use.
- Students are more likely to report drug-related problem(s) when an increasing proportion of their friends use cannabis.

The majority of students are going to try at least one drug

Recognizing that the majority of students are going to try at least one drug, including alcohol, and that those who choose not to are likely to be present in situations where substance use is occurring, it is essential that school communities implement policies aimed at minimizing the harm associated with use. [5]

What are the Key Issues?

Important Definitions

For the purposes of this document several terms are clarified.

A **Substance** refers to any chemical that affects living processes, other than food, that is taken into the body for non-medical purposes, or in non-accordance with a medical prescription. This includes, but is not limited to, alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, inhalants/solvents, depressants, narcotics/opiates, hallucinogens, mixed-action drugs, performance enhancing drugs, and stimulants.

Substance Abuse refers to any use of a substance that causes personal, emotional, social, legal, health, school-related, or financial problems.

Substance Use refers to any use of a substance.

Experimental/Moderate Use refers to the use of a substance out of curiosity or on limited occasions.

Harmful involvement refers to the relationship between substance use and associated problems. The consequences of harmful involvement may affect not only those students who use substances, but also those who do not use.

Some Common Terminology

Substance	Example	Street Names
Alcohol	Liquor, liqueur, spirits	Juice, booze, sauce, brew, hooch, moonshine, white lightning
Tobacco	Cigarettes, chewing tobacco	Butts, cigs, fags, smokes, cancer sticks, tumor candy, chew, snuff, pipe, cigar, gar
Cannabis	Marijuana, hashish, hashish oil	Hemp, pot, ganja, reefer, grass, weed, loco weed, Thai sticks, sinse, sativa, ace, pocket rocket, MJ, Mary Jane, jive, joint, leaf, doobie
Hallucinogens	LSD	Acid, dot, dots, domes, blotter, barrels, blue heaven, caps, electric kool-aid, flats, frogs, lids, trips, trippers, windowpane
	Psilocybin	Mushrooms, shrooms, magic mushrooms
Mixed Action Drugs	PCP	Angel dust, horse tranquillizer, hog, amoeba, CJ, cyclone, crystal, meth, DOA, goon, magic dust
	Methylenedioxymeth-amphetamine	MDMA, Ecstasy, E, XTC, 3, 4-, MDM, M&M, X, X&L, euphoria, ice, love drug, hug drug, true love

Harm Minimization

Harm minimization is an approach to education, prevention, treatment, and policy related to substance use that aims to reduce the risk and severity of the adverse consequences of substance use and/or substance abuse[5]. With regards to education and prevention, it attempts to achieve these through[5]:

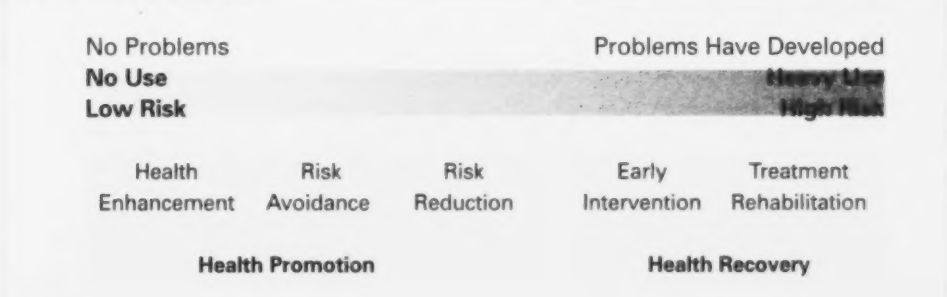
- Providing accurate information about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and the risks associated with experimental, moderate, and long-term use;
- Developing skills for less dangerous substance use; and
- Promoting more acceptable attitudes toward substance users in order to destigmatize users who may need help, thus facilitating help-seeking behaviour.

Substance use is a normative part of adolescence

Harm minimization recognizes that substance use has become, in many cases, a normative part of adolescence and that the psychosocial development of adolescence lends itself to curiosity and experimentation.[6,7,8] Research indicates that adolescent experimental/moderate substance-users may be psychologically healthier than both non-users and heavy-users[7]. It also indicates a paradoxical relationship between level of use and risk of harm, where first-time users and heavy users of alcohol or other drugs are at greater risk of harm than experimental/moderate users[5].

It is important to provide programs and services that target individuals at all stages of the continuum of risk (See Figure 2). This ranges from health enhancement for individuals who may not be using substances, to treatment and rehabilitation for those individuals who are experiencing harms as a result of their use. A generally applied harm minimization approach may prevent the escalation to harmful involvement among non-users and experimental/moderate users, as well as facilitate early intervention and referral to treatment for those already harmfully involved.

Figure 2 • **The Risk Continuum**



Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Health: A framework for the response to alcohol and drug problems in Ontario, 1988.

The harm minimization approach is not the opposite of abstinence models. Indeed in this approach, abstinence remains the ultimate 'risk-reduction' goal.[9] Harm minimization does not condone use, but the two approaches differ in several ways:

- Harm minimization recognizes the full **continuum** of substance use and related harm rather than **dichotomizing** abstinence and abuse.
- Harm minimization shifts from a **problem of use** focus, to a **problem with use** approach.
- Harm minimization provides information **about** drugs rather than **against** drugs.
- Rather than **isolation and criminality**, which may deter users from seeking help, harm minimization emphasizes **acceptance and understanding**.

Best Practices indicates the need to incorporate a harm minimization approach into a comprehensive student substance use policy, substance use education, and treatment of adolescent substance use.

For **information and resources** on substance use education consult:
http://www.undcp.org/youthnet/index.html
http://sano.camh.net/curricul/drug.htm
and
Current and Emerging Research on Successful Junior High Schools: the Middle Years, (1997).

Policy Approach: Zero-Tolerance vs. Harm Minimization

Traditional Approach

Zero Tolerance generally refers to school policies regarding alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and violence that emphasize punitive actions such as suspension, expulsion, or notification of the police. Very little has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies;[10] however, research suggests that such policies can have negative effects, such as:

- Alienating students at risk of harmful involvement, and further alienating students who may already be on the perimeter of the school community;[9,11]
- Placing the student at risk for dropping out of school – being suspended from school is a strong predictor of dropping out;[10]
- Placing the student in an environment where use is more likely – suspension and expulsion may place the student 'on the street';[10]
- Criminalizing users;[5]

- Reinforcing the adult status of certain activities, such as drinking, which may serve to increase curiosity and desire to use;[9] and
- Discouraging and preventing students from self-reporting substance use problems and seeking help for themselves or their friends.[5,9,11]
- Suspension, expulsion, and/or police intervention may be necessary in more extreme cases,[12] such as continuous infractions or students caught trafficking drugs. However, harm minimization policy alternatives are less punitive, and may be more helpful to the student by minimizing harm or preventing further use.

Advocated Approach

Harm Minimization applied to school policies would aim to promote health and well-being, and reduce the risk and severity of the adverse consequences of substance use. Such policies take into consideration the impact that zero-tolerance may have on a student.

Policies may vary depending on the type or severity of the student offense. For instance, trafficking may be dealt with differently than possession (see Legal Issues, p. 10), or when the substance is cocaine versus cannabis. Depending on the severity and the particular substance being used, consequences for substance use might include:

- First offense
  - Notification of parents or guardians
  - Meetings with the student, parent or guardian, incident manager and/or intervention counsellors

- Second offense
  - Referral to Addiction Services (see p.18)
  - Referral to other professional practice

- Third offense
  - Supervised suspensions served in-school, where proper facilities exist
  - Participation in community service projects
  - Suspensions from an extra-curricular school activity (e.g., sports, drama, recreation)

In all cases, disciplinary action should demonstrate concern for the health and safety of the student and the school community.[13] A policy should delineate sanctions for first and subsequent infractions regarding tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use, and should be consistently applied.

Best Practices indicates that it is NOT a good idea to implement a zero-tolerance policy (i.e. immediate suspension) regarding student substance use. Instead a series of responses should be outlined using alternatives to suspension, guided by an overall concern for the health, safety, and well-being of the student, staff, family or guardian, and school community.

Community Involvement

Schools exist within a broader community and can influence students beyond the walls of the school building. Thus, involving members of the school community, including students, is important to the development of school policies. In fact, research and best practice literature indicates that the greater the level of community involvement the larger the impact that an initiative can have[14].

Community involvement improves the quality of policy and decision-making[15], and may:

- Help to facilitate health promotion and build healthy schools through collaboration, cooperation, coordination, and reciprocity;[8,14,15,16]
- Increase the confidence and trust in the effectiveness of policy, increasing the credibility of the school and the school's policy;[8,14,15,16] and
- Build capacity among collaborators in areas such as policy development, cooperation, and group processes.[14,15]

The greater the level of community involvement the larger the impact

The school community includes many people considered stakeholders in the activities of the school. **Stakeholders** are individuals, groups, or organizations with an interest in an issue and its outcomes. Potential stakeholders include:

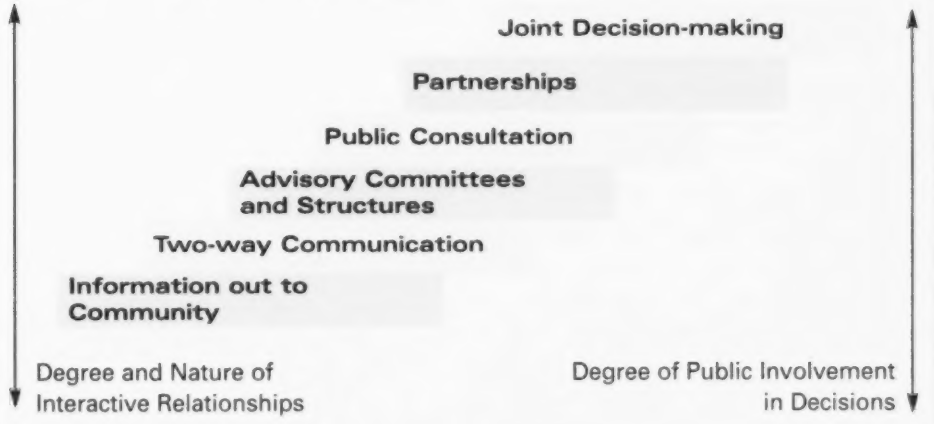
Students representing various groups within the school
Parents
Parent Teacher Associations
School administration, school advisory councils, teachers, support staff, guidance counsellors, health services staff, curriculum development staff
Nova Scotia Department of Education
Addiction Services
District School Boards
Nova Scotia Teachers Union
CHOICES Adolescent Treatment Program
Community Health Boards
Community Service Agencies (e.g. child protection)
Health promoting groups (e.g. Students Against Drunk Driving)
Law enforcement agencies
Legal agencies
Residents and businesses in the community where the school is located
District Health Authorities
Public Health Services
Teen health clinics
Youth groups
Substance use support groups (e.g. Alateen)
Churches
Recreation centres
Volunteer organizations

Community involvement in the development of student substance use policy is critical to the development of effective policy. Not all of the community stakeholders mentioned previously will necessarily have the same degree of interest, and so may participate in the process to varying degrees. Community involvement is generally considered to exist along a continuum, as shown in Figure 3.

- Passive participation means that the community may receive information from the school.
- As community involvement increases, participation becomes more interactive.
- Active participation means that community involvement is based on joint decision-making.

To maximize opportunities for success, schools developing student substance use policy must strive to attain the most active level of community involvement.

Figure 3 • **Continuum of Community Involvement**



Adapted from Health Canada 2001(b), Continuum of Public Involvement.

Best Practices indicates the need for the involvement of the school community, particularly students, in the development of student substance use policy. Students should be representative of different backgrounds, interests, and opinions regarding substance use, drawing participants from across the risk continuum.

Legal Issues[17]

Several key pieces of Federal and Provincial legislation have an impact on the relationship between schools and students, and on the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs by students:

- Federal
  - *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)*
  - *The Young Offenders Act (1985)* to be replaced by the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* on April 1, 2003.
  - *The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (1996)*
  - *The Criminal Code of Canada (1985)*

- Provincial
  - *The Education Act (1996) and School Code of Conduct (2001)*
  - *The Children and Family Services Act (1990)*
  - *The Liquor Control Act (1989)*
  - *Bill No. 125 – The Smoke-free Places Act (2002)*

There is often confusion as to whether or not it is legal for youth to possess or use controlled substances. In general, possession of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs is illegal for minors.

- Alcohol
  - No youth less than 19 years of age may possess alcohol.
  - It is not illegal, but if there are reasonable grounds (see p.11) to believe that a student possesses alcohol he or she may be searched and the alcohol seized.

- Tobacco
  - No youth less than 19 years of age may possess tobacco.
  - It is not illegal, but if there are reasonable grounds (see p.11) to believe that a student possesses tobacco he or she may be searched and the tobacco seized by someone designated as a peace officer.
  - This is part of new legislation, *The Smoke-free Places Act*, which comes into effect January 1, 2003.

- Drugs covered under the *Federal Controlled Drugs and Substances Act,* 1996
  - This includes cannabis and its products, amphetamines and their derivatives, hallucinogens, opiates/narcotics, benzodiazepines, steroids, and coca (cocaine).
  - Except as authorized under the regulations, no person shall possess any of these substances or an authorization to obtain any of these substances (i.e. a prescription).
  - Sale, provision, production, importation, exportation, or unauthorized possession of controlled drugs is illegal, and is punishable by fine and/or imprisonment.
  - Conviction of possession of small amounts is usually considered a summary conviction rather than an indictable offence.

    A **Summary Conviction** usually involves a fine but **does not** normally result in a criminal record.

- Other drugs/chemicals
  - This includes chemicals such as solvents/inhalants and over-the counter preparations (herbal remedies, some diet pills) with mood-altering properties.
  - Possession of these substances is not controlled; sale or provision may or may not be legal.

Schools do not have to report all incidents to law enforcement agencies

Schools do not have to report all incidents of substance use to law enforcement agencies. In practice, schools manage most minor instances involving student substance use without involving law enforcement agencies. Schools may wish to consult with the school board lawyer regarding any legal issue involved with student substance use.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) states that, "everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search and seizure". This means that students have an expectation of privacy of their person (i.e. body, locker, and desk) when attending school. A police officer must have a search warrant in order to search a person. However, Canadian legal precedent has been established with [R. v. M (R.M.)] (1998) that permits teachers or principals to search and seize illicit possessions based on reasonable grounds.

Reasonable grounds within a school can be established based on:

- Information received from one credible student.
- Information received from more than one student.
- Observations indicating that a student may have breached a school policy.

There are some important issues to consider when a search is deemed necessary that will maintain the 'reasonableness' of the search:

- Consider the age and gender of the student and the person conducting the search.
- Consider the gravity of the suspected offence, and whether immediate action is necessary or it can be postponed to a different time that may afford the student more privacy.
- Consider issues of privacy, confidentiality, sensitivity, and intrusiveness.
- Conduct searches with another person present.

Best Practices indicates the need to establish clear procedures for:

- Conducting searches of students and seizing illicit substances.
- Determining when, and under what circumstances, to contact police.
- Establishing reasonable grounds.
- Documenting substance use incidents.

For **more information** on legal issues and considerations consult the aforementioned Acts at
http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/index.html
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/legc
http://www.bccla.org/rightstalk/rightstalk.pdf
http://www.acjnet.org/teacher/freelega.htm

A student substance use policy is a collection of statements referring to the use of alcohol and other drugs among students. It outlines the position of the school with regard to substance use. It also establishes guidelines for prevention, harm minimization, early intervention and referral, and disciplinary action.

School policies can facilitate the creation of a healthy school environment

School policies can facilitate the creation of a healthy school environment that responds to the needs of all students. Student substance use policy is one element of a comprehensive strategy that promotes a "safe and productive learning environment," [18] as mandated by the Nova Scotia Department of Education.

The development of student substance use policy can be incorporated into the overall school improvement plan. This provides an opportunity to promote a positive learning environment, and represents a "systematic and comprehensive approach to the prevention and handling" [19] of substance use, harmful involvement, and substance abuse problems.

Why Develop a School-Based Substance Use Policy?

To date, little research has evaluated the effectiveness of student substance use policy. This reinforces the need for the policy development process to include evaluation.

Preliminary research conducted among School Boards in Ontario however, supports the development of student substance use policy. First, it suggests that policy lowers the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumed among students in grades 9 and 11. Second, it indicates that policy lowers the likelihood that students will participate in episodes of heavy drinking (5 or more drinks in one setting). Finally, it proposes that early exposure to student substance use policy increases the probability that students will be receptive to student substance use policy as they age.[20]

A review of the literature related to the prevention of substance use and associated harms indicates that schools should have a comprehensive substance use policy that is actively and consistently implemented and enforced[9]. Comprehensive policy includes clear rules, regulations, and consequences, offered in tandem with an educational strategy and early intervention and referral to counselling and treatment.

Benefits of a Substance Use Policy[21]

Through student substance use policy:

- **Schools**
  - Demonstrate concern for the well-being of students and the community.
  - Present an organized and consistent approach to managing incidents related to student substance use.
- **Students**
  - Understand guidelines for appropriate behaviour at school.
  - Are aware of corrective action policies related to student substance use.
- **School staff and administrators**
  - Are equipped to identify and support students harmfully involved with alcohol and other drugs.
  - Are supported by policy that directs a range of potential actions to address student issues related to substance use.
- **Parents**
  - Understand the position of the school with regard to substance use.
  - Are informed of current corrective action policies for the handling of incidents related to student substance use.
- **Community members** – individuals, groups, and organizations within the community
  - Are aware of policies related to student substance use.
  - Recognize that the school community extends beyond the walls of the school building.
  - Are valued for their role in creating a healthy school community.

Keys to a Successful Student Substance Use Policy

- Research indicates that student substance use policy is most effective when it is:
- Developed by a collaborative team of community members, including students;[1,11,13,22,23,24]
- Shaped by research and practical experience in student policy development;[25]
- Appropriate to the needs of all students, including those who are not using, and those who are using substances;[20]
- Concerned with the development of a healthy, safe school environment and positive school relationships;[26]
- Focused on prevention, early intervention, referral, and corrective action;[1,11,13,23,27]
- Consistent with messages included in the curriculum,[13] and existing policies governing the school, School Board, and provincial Department of Education;[24]
- Sensitive to community norms and cultural issues;[28]
- Written in clear language;[29,30]
- Widely disseminated to members of the community;[22,23]
- Fairly and consistently enforced by school administrators;[27,31,32]
- Applied uniformly to all members of the school community, including teachers and school staff;[27] and
- Evaluated during the policy development process[22] and after the process is complete.[1,22,24,25]

What Should the Policy Include?[33]

Health Promotion and Prevention

Health promotion involves the acquisition of knowledge, values, and skills to promote healthy behaviour and decision-making, and to support the creation of a healthy school environment. Substance use prevention uses health promotion strategies to help prevent or minimize the harms associated with substance use among students.

Collectively, elements of health promotion and prevention in student substance use policy should include:

- A statement clarifying the position of the school with respect to the possession, use, and/or distribution of alcohol and other drugs;
- A statement supporting the use of the provincially-mandated school curriculum for the instruction of knowledge, values, and skills related to substance use prevention;
- A statement that clarifies how the school drug policy fits into a comprehensive school health policy;
- A statement supporting informal school activities that enhance knowledge, values, and skills related to substance use prevention (e.g., drama club presentations, peer education activities);
- A description of the roles and responsibilities of school personnel in promoting substance use prevention; and
- An acknowledgement of the School Code of Conduct, which includes responses to student substance use.

The Healthy Schools Resource Guide (1999), *Current and Emerging Research on Successful Junior High Schools: The Middle Years* (1997) and *Preventing Substance Use Problems Among Young People: A Compendium of Best Practices* (2001) all indicate the need to integrate notions of health promotion into the whole school environment by:

- Using a collaborative approach to problem identification, problem solving, and decision making;
- Giving students opportunities to learn skills to limit their risk-taking behaviours;
- Using peer education as a strategy for both prevention and reaching youth at risk of harmful involvement in substance use; and
- Providing, or making available, counselling and mediation programs where positive, respectful, caring relationships are reinforced.

Early Intervention

Early intervention equips school personnel with the capacity to manage incidents of substance use that are experimental or occasional. It aims to prevent the escalation of substance use to harmful involvement using a harm minimization approach.

Elements of early intervention in student substance use policy should include:

a **Identification of an "Incident Manager"**
All substance-related school incidents will be reported and handled by this person. This may be a principal or vice principal who then refers the student to the "intervention counsellor" (or a designated guidance counsellor).

b **Identification of an "Intervention Counsellor"**
This person will conduct an initial assessment to determine the most appropriate type of intervention (i.e. school-based program, specific activity, or referral to treatment services). This may be done by a guidance counsellor, social worker, through a teen health clinic, etc.

c **Description of Roles and Responsibilities for:**
Incident manager
- Actions at first infraction and subsequent infractions,
- When to contact police

Intervention counsellor
- Referral procedures
- Advocacy
- Continued contacts and individual sessions

Other school personnel
- Immediate responses to incidents
- Delivery of curriculum content
- Own compliance with substance use policy

d **Description of Necessary Training for:**
Incident manager
- Frequency and updating of familiarity with policy and legal issues

Intervention counsellor
- Frequency and updating of counselling and addictions training

All school personnel
- Frequency and updating of familiarity with policy and legal issues,
- Identification of risks and signs of substance use or abuse
- Health promotion and harm minimization concepts

e **Identification of the Involvement of Parents or Guardians**
Description of the means through which parents or guardians will be involved in early intervention (may vary according the age of the involved student).

Referral to Treatment Services

Referral to treatment services – organizations and/or individuals specializing in alcohol and other drug counselling – must be offered to students whose substance use is problematic. A professional assessment will determine the extent to which treatment is required (if any), and will assist students with re-entry to the school.

Elements of the student substance use policy must inform the actions of the intervention counsellor responsible for referring harmfully involved students to professional practice.

The policy should include a:

- Detailed description of the process of referral;
- List identifying the organizations or individuals to whom involved students will be referred;
- Statement describing the extent to which the student has the right to refuse referral;
- Statement describing the means through which parents or guardians will be involved in referral (may vary according the age of the involved student);
- Statement describing the ways in which the school will support the student post-referral (i.e., during assessment and treatment);
- Clear outline for managing re-entry of the student into the school;
- Statement describing the role of school personnel in supporting others affected by student substance use (e.g., students, staff, parents, families).

For **information on agencies and organizations** to assist youth and their families affected by harm associated with substance use and/or gambling, contact:

Addiction Services, Nova Scotia Department of Health
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Phone: (902) 424-7220 Fax: (902) 424-1740

Addiction Services, District Health Authorities 1, 2, & 3
Yarmouth, Nova Scotia
Phone: (902) 742-2406 Fax: (902) 742-0684

Addiction Services, District Health Authorities 4, 5, & 6
Pictou, Nova Scotia
Phone: (902) 485-4335 Fax: (902) 485-7206

Addiction Services, District Health Authorities 7 & 8
Sydney, Nova Scotia
Phone: (902) 563-2060 Fax: (902) 563-2059

Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services, Capital Health 9
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia
Phone: (902) 424-5623 Fax: (902) 424-0627

Disciplinary Procedures

The School Code of Conduct and the student substance use policy will inform disciplinary procedures. These are the actions to be taken with students involved in incidents related to substance use. In order to be effective, school administrators and other school personnel responsible for policy enforcement must support corrective actions outlined in the student substance use policy.

In accordance with the School Code of Conduct, disciplinary procedures must emphasize respect for students harmfully involved with substances. These procedures have the potential to impact short-term and long-term student-school relationships, and should include:

- A definition of what constitutes a drug offense (with reference to the law);
- A detailed outline of the consequences to be applied to infractions against school policy, with statements specific to the possession, use or misuse, and distribution of each of the following:
  - Alcohol
  - Tobacco
  - Controlled drugs and substances
  - Inhalants/solvents
  - Medical and non-medical stimulants
  - Performance enhancing drugs
- Detailed procedures for the management of:
  - Student self-reports of substance use to school personnel,
  - Peer-reporting of substance use to school personnel,
  - Public complaints filed in relation to substance use,
  - Violence related to substance use,
  - Students exhibiting signs and/or symptoms of substance use, and
  - Students exhibiting signs and/or symptoms of withdrawal from substances;
- Due process for the maintenance of confidentiality (this may vary depending on legal issues and the age of the involved student);
- A protocol for reporting incidents of substance use to parents/legal guardians (this may vary depending on legal issues and the age of the involved student); and
- A protocol for reporting incidents of substance use to legal authorities.

Self-reported substance use may be a means of seeking help

Consideration should be given to self-reported and peer-reported substance use. Self-reported substance use may be a means of seeking help among harmfully involved students. In order to encourage these students to come forward, and to minimize harms related to their use, student substance use policies should include provisions to minimize or eliminate disciplinary action when substance use is self-reported.[34] It is essential that student substance use policy **does not** act as deterrent to help-seeking behaviours among students.

Best Practices indicates the need for specific procedures for self-reported substance use that are supportive of the student, rather than punitive, and that facilitate early intervention and referral to Addiction Services.

How Should the Policy Be Developed?[35]

This section outlines a framework to guide the process of developing student substance use policy. It is important to note that although these are presented here in a sequence or step-like fashion, all elements should be considered throughout the process and planned for ahead of time. For example, evaluating the policy is listed in terms of when it should occur, but evaluation will be more efficient, and more easily completed, if planned for in advance.

Identify Key Stakeholders

Key stakeholders may hold opposing viewpoints regarding student substance use. The stakeholders involved in the policy development process need to become familiar with best practices (See Section: *What are the Key Issues?*, p.4-12) in order to facilitate consensus on the issues.

Key Stakeholders have a variety of roles, including:

- Making recommendations for policy content;
- Revising policy drafts; and
- Communicating the policy development process to the community.

It will also be important to:

- Develop strategies for getting input from various stakeholders.
- Identify strategies to keep stakeholders informed of progress.
- Determine stakeholders who may be interested in active participation by sitting on an Advisory Committee charged with the development of the policy.
- Ensure that students are actively involved as stakeholders (see Figure 3, p.9).

(See Section: *Community Involvement*, page 8, for a list of key stakeholders.)

Form an Advisory Committee

A sub-committee of existing School Advisory Councils, consisting of key stakeholders, could be established to assume the major responsibility for the development of the student substance use policy. Criteria for selecting Advisory Committee members include:[36]

- Demonstrated expertise with adolescents and adolescent issues.
- Knowledge of addictions issues and best practices.
- Abilities, or skills to bring to the council.
- Time to devote to the council.
- Representative of the population.

Before actually developing the components of the student substance use policy, the Advisory Committee will need to develop the following introductory elements:

1 **Terms of reference, including**
Mandate
Membership criteria
Reporting relationship
Frequency of meetings

2 **Statement of philosophy**
The statement of philosophy outlines the vision and beliefs of the school with respect to student substance use policy. This should refer to the role of substance use policy in creating a safe and healthy school environment, how such a policy can contribute to the overall school improvement plan, and other reasons why the school community values a student substance use policy.

3 **Statement of goal**
This is a **broad** statement about the purpose of developing student substance use policy. For example – To design and implement a policy which will create a safe and healthy school environment.

4 **Measurable objectives**
Measurable objectives outline the anticipated outcomes of the student substance use policy. They are useful in monitoring and evaluating the progress of the policy development process. Measurable objectives must clearly state:
- WHO the policy will affect (e.g., students)
- WHAT the policy will affect (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours)
- WHEN the desired effects will be measured (i.e., clarify month and year)

5 **Success Indicators** (for further information see p.27-28)
Identifying success indicators is essential for later determining if the objectives have been met. Success indicators are signs showing that the policy, once developed and implemented, has achieved the objectives. For example, if a WHAT objective is to include harm minimization in substance use education, some success indicators **might** be:
- Documentation indicating that harm minimization has been included into teaching strategies.
- The number of teachers having attended a workshop/reporting awareness of harm minimization principles.
- The number of students reporting awareness of harm minimization principles.
- A decrease in the number of students reporting problems associated with substance use, as measured by the Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey.

6 **Glossary of terms**

A glossary of terms ensures that members of the Advisory Committee have an agreed-upon definition of terms that require clarification. It should make particular reference to "medicinal drug use" which may exempt students with particular medical conditions from sections of the policy. The glossary of terms can later be appended to the student substance use policy for reference.

7 **Policy parameters**

Clear statements explaining when, where, and to whom the student substance use policy applies must be developed. Determine whether the policy will apply:

- At school functions that take place off school property?
- On evenings?
- On weekends?
- To school personnel?
- To school visitors?
- To community members or groups using school facilities (i.e. community groups, sports teams)?

8 **Description of the policy development process**

Including a description of the policy development process lends credibility to the policy itself. A well-documented policy development process is valuable reference material that provides a framework for process evaluation. This should include the development of both a communications (see p.24) and evaluation (see p.27-28) strategy.

9 **Date(s) for review**

To ensure that the student substance use policy maintains the capacity to respond to current student substance use issues facing the school, dates for long-term evaluation must be included in the policy. Evaluation should occur annually, before the start of the new school year.

Assess Community Needs and Assets

Assessing need can ensure the extent to which student substance use policy builds on the community strengths and is able to promote health and meet the needs of students.

Assessing need involves:

- Meeting with local health officials to discuss substance use trends in your community.
- Meeting with school officials to discuss existing student substance use policies.
- Meeting with individuals from other schools who have developed student substance use policy to share their experiences.
- Enlisting the support of the school community and the School Board.
- Talking with students about their knowledge and attitudes regarding substance use and the associated harms.

Identifying community assets involves exploring the resources available within the community that may support the development of student substance use policy. This may include individuals, groups, or organizations that offer some resource to the development process. Possible resources include:

- **Students**, as they may provide;
- Access to marginalized, or out-of-the-mainstream youth, such as those who have dropped-out, street youth, and cultural minorities;
- First-hand information regarding the specific substance use patterns, trends, and associated harms in a particular school community; and
- Skills and capacity for assisting with the policy development process, such as data entry and analysis in the evaluation phase of the process (see p.27)
- Existing substance use policy documents established at the school.
- Other schools or school boards that have already established a current policy.
- Current (and future) data from the Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey.
- Information from other services and organizations (see p.8).
- Community Health Boards (i.e. community profiles)
- Law Enforcement Agents
- Media sources (e.g., newspapers, television, Internet)

Identifying community needs and assets also involves determining potential barriers to policy development, which may increase the credibility of the content of the policy and the likelihood that resolutions to these barriers will be developed. Potential barriers may include:

- The availability of organizations or individuals for referral to professional practice.
- Cultural perceptions of adolescent substance use within the community.
- Unrealistic expectations for substance use policy within the community.

Collect Information

Collecting background information on student substance use informs the process of policy development. Information can be obtained from the resources suggested in the previous section, as well as other resources identified by key stakeholders in your school community. This information can provide important baseline date that will be useful in monitoring the long-term effectiveness of the policy.

Both quantitative and qualitative information will be necessary.

- **Quantitative data** is statistical information documenting the extent to which members of the school community are affected by the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- **Qualitative data** is perceptual information about attitudes, values, and behaviours related to substance use. This type of data is valuable for determining support for policy and potential barriers to the development process.

Communicate Information

The Advisory Committee must establish a communication plan outlining the means by which information will be communicated. Communicating information between the Advisory Committee and members of the school community is essential to sustain the interest of community members in student substance use policy. Communication should be ongoing throughout the policy development process.

Communicating information includes reporting in school newsletters, newspapers or websites, holding an information meeting or assembly, and producing brochures, posters or signs. Initially, the community will require information about the:

- Need for substance use policy.
- Shared responsibility of all community members in managing student substance use.
- Benefits of student substance use policy to school-community relationships.
- Policy development process to be followed by the Advisory Committee.
- Ways that the community can become further involved in the policy development process.

Write the Policy

Drafting a student substance use policy involves three key steps:

1 Writing the policy using language that is easily understood, clear, and concise.
2 Circulating the draft policy among key stakeholders, providing some time for review, and ensuring that feedback is returned within the established timeframe.
3 Revising the policy according to stakeholder feedback.

It is advisable to then have the final draft reviewed by a stakeholder who has professional expertise in legal issues or law enforcement. If a stakeholder with this background is unavailable, the School Board's legal council should be asked to review the proposed policy.

Preparing the final student substance use policy for publication involves two key steps:

1 Writing the final policy document for use by those directly involved in the management of student substance use.
2 Writing a summary of the policy for use by members of the larger community indirectly involved in the management of student substance use.

Implement the Policy

Implementing the policy involves four key processes: pre-implementation, implementation, post-implementation, and evaluation.

1 **Pre-implementation** involves:
- Establishing an official date when the student substance use policy will take effect.
- Training people directly involved with the enforcement of the policy (e.g., teachers) at staff meetings, in-services, and conferences.
- Communicating to the school community that the policy is ready for implementation.

2 **Implementation** involves:
- Applying the policy fairly and consistently.

3 **Post-implementation** involves:
- Building on opportunities to integrate the substance use policy into the school atmosphere (e.g., promoting the policy at times when the risk of substance use is increased, including before spring break, summer holidays, or graduation).

4 **Evaluation** is essential to building a greater understanding of the impact that a comprehensive student substance use policy can have on the attitudes and behaviours of students. Evaluating the process, impacts, and outcomes of student substance use policy can build upon the limited body of literature related to the effectiveness of school policy as means for the prevention and harm minimization of student substance use. Evaluation is discussed further in Section C.1, p.27-28.

Sustain the Policy

The work of the Advisory Committee does not end when the student substance use policy is implemented and evaluated. The Committee must meet at regular intervals (e.g., three months, six months, twelve months) to discuss emerging issues related to student substance use policy, including:

- How will new members of the school community be informed of the student substance use policy (e.g., at the start of each new school year)?
- How will the policy be promoted on an on-going basis?
- How will people involved in policy enforcement be trained on an on-going basis?
- How often will the effectiveness of the policy be re-evaluated?

What is the Role of the School Board?

School Boards can support the development of a student substance use policy in several ways.

1 Support the establishment of School Advisory Committees and support them in the development of student substance use policy.
2 Offer training and support to teachers, counsellors, and other school staff related to student substance use.
3 Provide guidelines and support for the delivery of a province-wide substance use curriculum supplement that endorses prevention and harm reduction principles.
4 Implement, monitor, and evaluate student substance use policies.
5 Build a liaison with local Addiction Services to help increase awareness for programs and services available for schools and students.

Evaluating your Student Substance Use Policy[35]

Evaluating the policy is critical to both the short-term and long-term success of the student substance use policy. The information generated through evaluation provides direct feedback about the effectiveness of the policy to members of the Advisory Committee, key stakeholders, school officials, and members of the larger school community. Evaluating the policy leads to improvements in both the policy development process and the policy itself. It also explores the contribution of policy to promoting healthy behaviour among students.

To effectively evaluate student substance use policy, three key areas must be examined: the **process** through which the policy was developed, the **impact** on immediate attitudes and behaviours in the school community, and the long-term **outcomes** achieved.

The process evaluation should determine:

- The extent to which the Advisory Committee followed an action plan.
- The extent to which the Advisory Committee achieved its goals and objectives.
- The cohesiveness of the Advisory Committee.
- The number of people in attendance at information sessions.
- The number of key stakeholders involved in reviewing the policy.
- The level of satisfaction of key stakeholders with the policy development process (planning, implementation, evaluation and follow-up).
- The level of satisfaction of key stakeholders with the policy itself.

The impact evaluation should determine:

- The level of awareness about the policy among members of the school community.
- The number of substance-related infractions occurring on school property.
- The number of substance-related infractions occurring in the larger community.
- The level of compliance with the policy on the part of students, staff, and teachers.

The outcome evaluation should determine

- Changes in the prevalence of student substance use.
- Changes in student attitudes concerning substance use.
- Reductions in harms associated with substance use.
- These may be indicated/measured by future findings of the Nova Scotia Student Drug Use Survey.

Student substance use policies may be evaluated through written surveys, focus groups, interviews, and/or secondary data. Surveys may be useful for assessing satisfaction, attitudes, and awareness. Focus groups may also be used for these same purposes, as well as to determine the cohesiveness of the Advisory Committee or, when students have been included in the process, how they feel about participating in such an activity. Similarly, interviews may be used for the same purposes. Secondary data might include Advisory Committee meeting minutes to assess the extent to which they followed the action plan, feedback forms to assess the number of stakeholders involved in reviewing the policy, and school incident reports to assess compliance.

There are many resources on evaluation for school-based programs and policies. Some recommended readings are:

A framework for the evaluation of activities and programs with harm-reduction objectives, (1999).

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